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Special Report

The Ill-Starred Ninth World Youth Festival

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THE ILL-STARRED NINTH WORLD YOUTH FESTIVAL

The twice-postponed Ninth World Youth Festival scheduled to open on 28 July in Sofia, Bulgaria, seems foredoomed to fall short of its objectives. Forced to cancel the festival in Algeria in 1965 and Ghana in 1966 by the downfall of those governments, festival organizers abandoned their attempts to minimize the event's Communist associations and have returned it to the comparatively sheltered haven of Eastern Europe. Havana was rejected as the site, over bitter Cuban protests, because the Soviets were afraid that Castro would use the festival to promote his type of revolution.

World Youth Festivals have become expensive, hard-to-regulate, logistic nightmares with marginal propaganda value. As a result, the ninth festival, which may draw 30,000 participants, probably will be the last of its kind. Coming as it does in the midst of student revolt throughout the world, previous arguments on the cost effectiveness of the festival undoubtedly have been superseded by the problem of handling a potentially explosive gathering of restless youth. Ideological and nationalistic disputes are sure to flare in private discussions and may spill into the main proceedings, an outcome that would interrupt the focus of the conference on the noncontroversial topic for festival participants of Vietnam and embarrass the Communist sponsors. This prospect is causing extreme anxiety among the festival's organizers who have come to recognize the unpredictable nature of their creation.

Background

World Youth Festivals (WYF) have been the most spectacular of the Communist propaganda efforts directed at youth, and attract the largest number of non-Communist participants. Their objective is to create an atmosphere of international support for Soviet policies and to con-

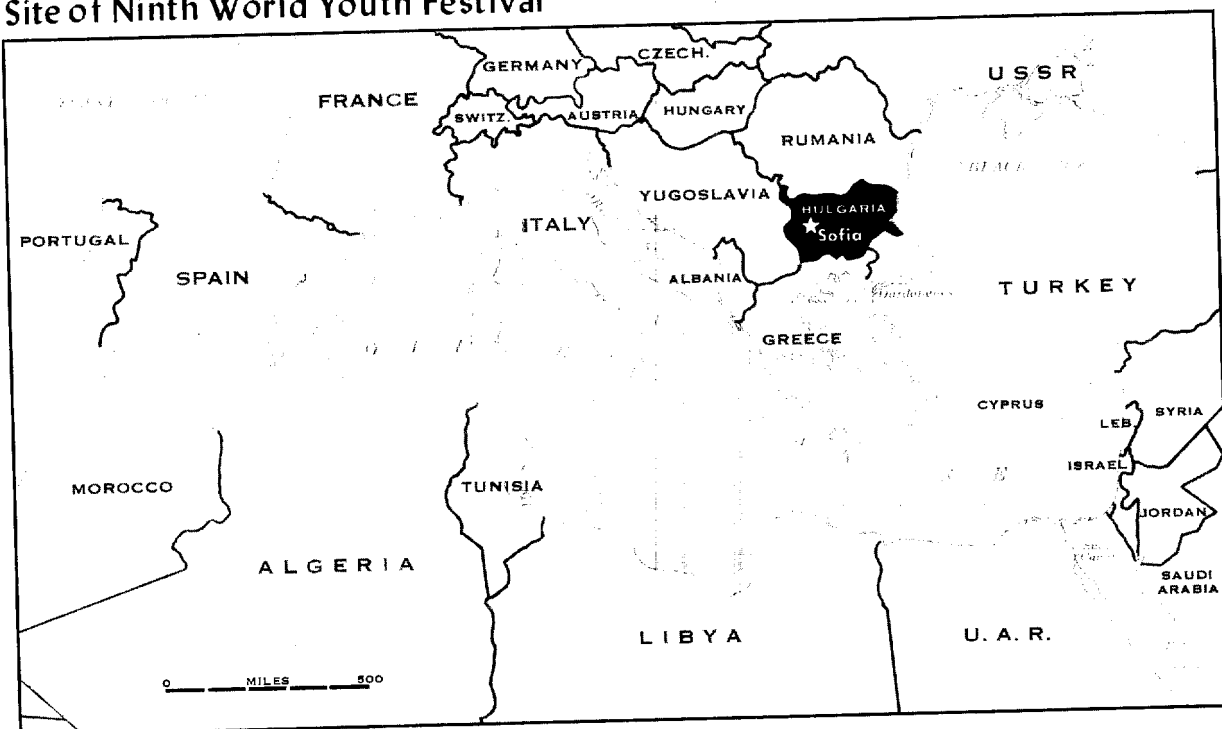
vert uncommitted youth and students to the Communist way of thinking by portraying Western countries as imperialist aggressors and Communist countries, particularly the Soviet Union, as the leading supporters of "oppressed people's."

The first six festivals were held in the Soviet Union

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Site of Ninth World Youth Festival



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and Eastern European capitals, beginning with Prague in 1947 and ending in Moscow in 1957. In an effort to blur the image of a Communist-controlled affair, the seventh (1959) and eighth (1962) festivals were held in Vienna and Helsinki respectively. The changes of venue created serious difficulties for festival organizers. In those cities the organizers had no support from the host governments and were unable fully to control mass rallies in the face of organized "counterpropaganda" efforts by non-Communist youth. At Helsinki, full-scale riots erupted when thousands of Finland's younger generation stoned festival buses. The sponsors had to face a free press and critical public, and a number of Communist delegates used their brief exposure to the free world to defect.

The public antagonism the seventh and eighth festivals encountered dampened the spirits of participants and left considerable doubt as to whether a ninth festival was in the best interests of the cause. The exorbitant costs of previous events have far outweighed the marginal propaganda gains and have discouraged many former festival supporters. Nevertheless, in late 1964, festival organizers decided that another festival would be held in Algiers in July 1965.

Cuba had lobbied extensively to have Havana chosen as the site, but Algiers was selected because its government was non-Communist and cooperative, and its location favored the participation of



A Soviet nuclear test blast the day before the Helsinki Festival ended initiated anti-bomb appeals against both the East and West.



Festival delegates carrying these banners, however, were forcibly restrained from marching in the closing parade by festival officials.

91375 7-68

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SECRET

25X1

large delegations from Africa and Asia. Cuba was promised that Havana would be the site of the tenth festival. All plans, however, were upset by the ouster of President Ben Bella a few weeks before the opening date. Festival directors left Algiers complaining of the open hostility of the new Algerian Government and announced that the event had been postponed for a year.

The search for a new site was complicated because many potential host governments did not want to provoke the new Algerian regime. Growing ideological differences between the Soviet Union and Cuba led Moscow to shy away from Havana in favor of Cairo, but President Nasir flatly refused "to turn Cairo into an arena for Sino-Soviet gladiators." Finally, Ghana's President Nkrumah offered the hospitality of Accra, and the affair was to open in July 1966. When Nkrumah was deposed in February 1966 festival arrangers, by now somewhat desperate, fell back on Bulgaria, the only safe Communist country which had never hosted a WYF, because it offered "definite political guarantees."

Sponsorship and Attendance

The festivals are nominally sponsored and organized by the International Preparatory Committee (IPC). Despite its seemingly representative appearance, this committee is in fact a front for the Soviet-dominated World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY) and the International Union of Students (IUS).

On the national level, if the political climate permits,

a local Communist party or front group will usually organize a National Preparatory Committee (NPC), which will appear to be, and in some cases actually is, a reasonable representation of the country's youth organizations. Usually Communists retain control of the various NPCs in order to ensure control of the composition of the delegation. According to Bulgarian information media, NPCs have been set up in more than 90 countries to plan for the ninth festival. National delegations at Sofia will vary in size from thousands of official Bulgarian delegates to small groups of students residing in Communist Europe but ostensibly representing small or distant countries, including some hostile to Communism.



International Preparatory Headquarters in Sofia
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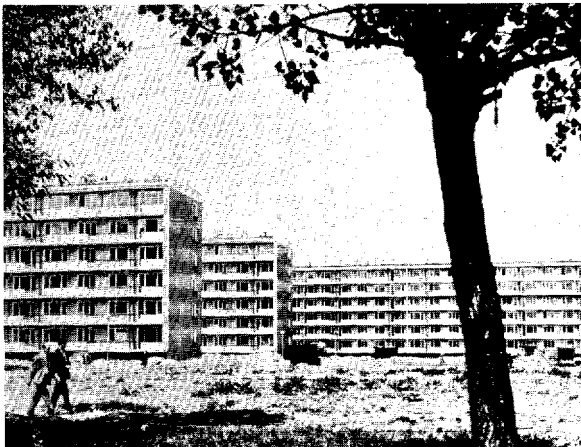
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According to an IPC announcement last March, 148 countries have been invited to send delegations to the Sofia festival and 120 have accepted. Various estimates place the number expected as high as 30,000, which would make it one of the largest. There will be between 15,000-20,000 foreign delegates, 3,000-4,000 Bulgarian delegates and the remainder will be "observers and tourists."



According to Bulgarian information media, a number of special



A portion of "Festival City" under construction in Sofia to house festival delegates.

91378 7-68

guests have been invited, including Joan Baez, Avery Brundage, Cassius Clay, the Beatles, and the Rolling Stones. Bulgarian sources insist, with no little pride, that the two entertainment groups definitely have agreed to perform at the festival.

According to the Soviet youth organ Komsomolskaya Pravda, the organization of the American delegation is in the hands of the Dubois Clubs. In addition to the Dubois Clubs, youth from the Students for a Democratic Society, the Student Mobilization Committee for Ending the War in Vietnam, and the Congress of Racial Equality will make up the major part of the American delegation. A "well-known Californian young people's theater," managed by Luis Valdes, and "many Negro athletes who are boycotting the Olympic games" will also attend, according to the Soviet press release. The official program strongly suggests that US military deserters also will be present.

Program

The program of the ninth festival is heavily weighted toward political matters and will focus on Vietnam. The second day of the festival, 29 July, has been declared the "Day of Solidarity of Youth with the Heroic Struggle of the People and Youth of Vietnam Against the Aggression of American Imperialism." This session clearly is intended to set the tone of the festival. Events of that day will include meetings between young Vietnamese and young Americans; blood donations for the Vietnamese people; conferences on various Vietnamese

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25X1

problems; and gift presentations to the Vietnamese people. Festival directors apparently hope to use the momentum generated by the Vietnam day to introduce such other issues as European security and the need for increasing the Soviet presence in the Middle East. Every attempt will be made to avoid issues on which the Soviets are vulnerable to criticism, such as the crackdown on intellectuals in the USSR.

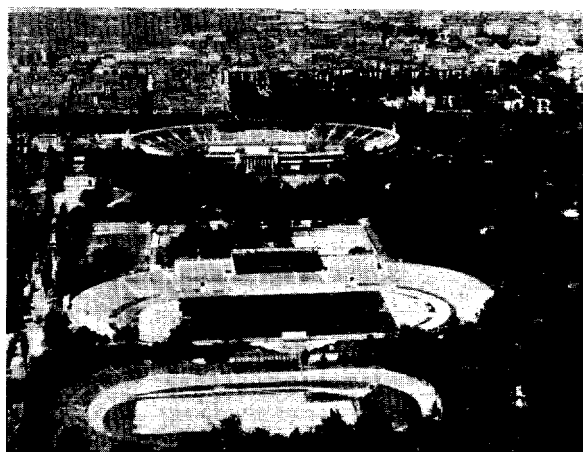
The festival's cultural program will be divided into two categories; first, concerts, recitals, and performances for the delegates; second, competition between delegations in folk singing and dancing, athletics, instrumental performances, and "political songs." Even this part will have its political manifestations, however, as winners of the various events will be awarded souvenirs made from parts of US military aircraft shot down over North Vietnam. The main events will be held in Vasil Levski Stadium which is being renovated and will accommodate 75,000 persons.

Cost

Available financial reports of earlier festivals indicate that the staging of these events has cost between \$10 million and \$50 million. These reports are probably not reliable. Some observers estimated the cost of the 1957 Moscow Festival at \$100 million. Participants pay an enrollment fee and a fixed sum toward their travel and accommodation expenses, although these

are often waived for delegates from poor, developing countries. National committees raise money through bazaars, rallies, cultural and sporting events held before and during a festival, but they always fall short of requirements, and the Soviet Union and its allies pump funds into festival channels.

Rumors that Moscow is no longer willing to pick up such huge tabs has led to speculation that the Ninth WYF will be the last of its kind. Many countries reportedly favor smaller regional gatherings rather than world-wide festivals. Rumania and Yugoslavia reportedly have indicated that they want to reduce their participation and share of expenses toward the Sofia Festival. Polish youth groups submitted documents to the IPC in early May declaring the World Youth Festival an obsolete form of political initiative which should be replaced by a less costly and more efficient program.



Sofia's sports stadiums including the Vasil Levski Stadium (top) where a majority of the Festival's events will take place.

91376 7-68

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Ideological Divergencies

The Sofia festival comes at a time of considerable restiveness and ferment among European youth and could incur large ideological as well as financial costs for the Communist regimes. The Bulgarian foreign minister has expressed his concern that Sofia will be hosting the festival at a time when the restlessness of youth and the disarray within the Communist movement are apparent everywhere. The influence of the non-Communist visitors upon Eastern Europe's sheltered young people at a time when they are groping for new forms of political expression and criticizing oppressive measures in their own countries could be significant. At this juncture even the bringing together of Czechoslovak youth with their Eastern European contemporaries is enough to cause anxiety within the Communist regimes.

This fear has been exposed in the 10 July issue of Mlada Fronta, a Czechoslovak youth magazine. The article, entitled "Are We Trusted," notes that the Czechoslovak delegation has been billeted with delegations from Western countries in contrast to previous festivals when it shared quarters with young people from socialist states. The article speculates that this innovation was prompted by a fear that discussions between socialist youth might become "too lively."

The Soviets reportedly fear that intra-Communist controversies, especially the Czechoslovak

situation, could replace Vietnam as the main theme of the festival.

The Bulgarian press has already called for vigilance lest some "unwelcome developments" take place during the festival. In an article published in the 13 May issue of Bulgaria's main party daily Rabotnichesko Delo, Petur Mladenov, a Bulgarian Komsomol secretary, warned against "the role of a Trojan horse which might be played by some right-wing extremists of the international youth movement." Reflecting what appear to be widespread misgivings about the festival, Mladenov also cautioned that "efforts might be initiated by some left-wing extremist elements to split the cohesion of international youth."

Other voices have been predicting the possibility of a bitter ideological struggle at the festival. On 19 May the Bulgarian youth daily, Narodna Mladezh, carried an interview by the then Soviet Komsomol leader Sergei Pavlov. He referred to those antifestival forces which "tried to put a spoke in the wheel of the Vienna and Helsinki festivals" and warned of groups going to Sofia "in the role of using the festival to advocate their political concepts." He predicted a

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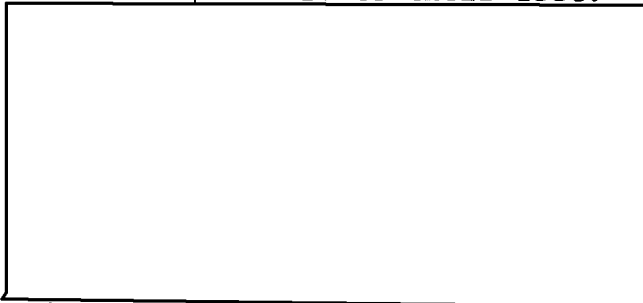
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"bitter ideological struggle" at the festival and observed that "it is necessary to prepare for the struggle in all seriousness."

One of the purposes of these and other press items of similar tone may be to establish the groundwork for explaining any catastrophes at the festival or even a last-minute cancellation should the organizers sense that control was slipping out of their hands.

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Against this background an Italian proposal for serious discussions of European student problems at the Ninth WYF must have brought virtually all of the festival planners to their feet.



the Italian Communist Party considers the student movement important and intends to try to get this phenomenon explored at the festival.

National Conflicts

Conflicts of national interest also threaten to disrupt the festival. Moroccan and Tunisian representatives announced at an organizational meeting in Warsaw in May that their delegations would walk out if any Israelis attended. Three Israeli youth

groups, one of them Communist, are not being allowed to attend the festival because they support their country against the Arabs. Festival organizers are frantically trying to assemble an Israeli group which will be acceptable to all delegates, in order to avoid accusations of anti-Semitism from some of the Western European delegations. If an Israeli delegation does attend the festival it will probably be composed of members associated with the faction within the Communist Party of Israel that does not support Tel Aviv's position in the Middle East conflict.

Cuba is still incensed that Havana was not chosen as the site and has announced that its youth organizations will boycott the Sofia meeting.



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ferences with Moscow over "the principle of armed struggle as means for Communist take-overs" were behind the rejection. Cuba may plan a "counterfestival" this summer. Havana supposedly already has recruited 1,000 students from those who participated in protests at European universities to come to Cuba for a stay of a month and a half. The students, who will be paying their own way, will engage in agricultural work in the morning and political studies in the afternoon.

Other national enmities could encumber many aspects of the Sofia Festival as they have during other Communist international forums. The Seventh General Assembly

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of WFDY which was held in Sofia in June 1966 was repeatedly disrupted by Indian-Pakistani, Arab-Israeli, Somali-Ethiopian and Sino-Soviet antagonisms. The IPC has not received an official response from China and Albania regarding their participation at the festival, but if they do not attend their cases will undoubtedly be argued by proxy.

Conclusion

The return of the festival to a safe Communist country is a humiliating retreat. It also revives the festival's close identification with Communism, which the organizers have tried so hard to avoid. After the embarrassing foreclosures in Algiers and Accra, the Sofia Festival probably is meant to be a final face-saving jamboree.

Considering the common denominator of dissent among today's younger generation, the outcome of the festival is unpredictable. The discord at the festivals in Vienna and Helsinki produced something less than the image of complete "peace, friendship, and solidarity," the official slogan of the ninth festival. Strong-arm tactics designed to associate all festival activities with Vietnam in order to avoid subjects which the Soviets find dis-

tasteful could be counterproductive. Some delegates appear intent on examining the phenomenon of student unrest and other explosive "generation gap" topics, not only in private discussions but as part of the official agenda. As in such cases in the past these topics probably will not make the agenda but may be relegated to the back burner in a small "study group" which is easier to control.

The festival probably will endorse the Soviet line on Vietnam and on European political issues. These "achievements in solidarity" will be used to paper over ideological divergencies which are virtually certain to erupt at the festival. These disputes, plus nationality clashes, will deal a telling blow to the fragile facade of unity. It is difficult to imagine how the objective of WYFs (to convert youth to the Soviet approach to Communism) can be advanced in this atmosphere.

For all these reasons, and despite defensive propaganda denials, the dinosaurian species of WYF will probably soon be extinct. It will most likely be replaced by smaller regional gatherings which will be less expensive and easier to control, but harder to coordinate and with even less impact on the world's youth.

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